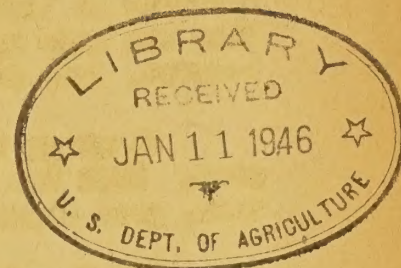


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BETTER BABIES CLUB WORK IN LOGAN COUNTY, ARKANSAS
(An Extension Case History 1)

By

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I. The Background

Logan County, Arkansas is essentially a rural county. There are 2,792 farms - all of which are operated by white families with the exception of 35 operated by Negro families. Approximately one-third of the families (or 937) are tenant families while the rest are of the owner, manager, or part owner group.

Logan County is a rolling hill type of country with small fertile valleys following small streams. Its people are sturdy, hill type folk, descendants for the most part of Scotch and Irish ancestry who first settled in Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama and then went farther west to Arkansas. While they are a very independent people, they have been most cooperative in undertaking programs involving agriculture and homemaking progress. About a fifth of the population on the north side of the county is of German and French ancestry.

Like most hill people farming relatively poor land, Logan County farmers have been conservative--growing (for the most part) most of the food and feed needed for man and livestock and spending relatively little for clothing and household goods. Frugal by nature and by necessity, these same farmers have living conditions much better than many farm families with much higher incomes. Their houses are on the whole fair to good and, of recent years, many farm families have utilized native stone, rough lumber, and local sand and gravel for constructing new homes and for remodeling and repairing old ones. This fact is brought out to testify to the native ingenuity of this very sturdy farm people.

Although farm families have spent relatively little money for food and although they have grown much of the food they have eaten, this does not mean that all families have lived as well as they might. This is reflected in the general health of the people which, while about average for the State, does leave something to be desired. The fact that the State hospital for tuberculosis is located in Booneville, the county seat, has made the county somewhat conscious of tuberculosis dangers.

There exist very few social distinctions between owner and tenant groups in the county since the tenant in many cases may be the young son just started up the agricultural ladder. The 68 home demonstration clubs

1 One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the Conference on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-Torn Countries, held in Washington, D.C., September 19-22, 1944 Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations, cooperating.

of the county are made up of both tenant and owner families. Just as likely as not, the president of the club will be the energetic young wife of a tenant farmer or she may be the country doctor's wife! The only way a family is looked down upon socially is when they won't work or because they are lazy and shiftless. This fact won't bar these good neighbors, however, from standing by in cases of sickness, trouble, or death.

Cleavage to neighborhood lines is a marked characteristic of the area. This has been broken down to some extent with improved transportation, good roads, and consolidated schools.

The Church remains a mighty factor in the life of a neighborhood. Most often, a neighborhood is built around church affiliations rather than other community facilities. The Baptist, Methodist, and other Protestant denominations predominate in the county, although about a fifth of the population is Catholic.

Aims in life are relatively simple and usually not above accomplishment. They are (1) to live self-respecting lives and to worship as they desire, (2) to achieve some comforts in life in the way of comfortable and convenient homes, (3) to rear and educate their children to the best of their ability and the child's talent.

Changes taking place in the county have come about as the result of schools being consolidated and economic changes in the State sending families to urban areas for employment in times of prosperity and the return of these families to the farms upon the occurrence of depressions. Some outstanding families in every neighborhood have left their farms to give advantages to their children not apparently possible in rural areas.

The county home demonstration agent, Marcelle Phillips, went to this county as a home demonstration agent on July 1, 1919 and has remained through the years. The extent of her influence during this period is shown in the growth of home demonstration club work and of its spread to non-member families. One farm woman out of every two were members of home demonstration clubs in 1943 and 75% of all families were reached either directly or indirectly by home demonstration groups. A total of 2,690 families were enlisted in the Food for Victory Program and adopted a live-at-home program in 1943.

II. The Problem

The birth rate in this hill county has always been high. Child health, while not worse than that in surrounding counties, has been a very great problem. While some trouble was due to causes other than malnutrition, the home demonstration agent has always felt that under-nourishment was a great problem and one which she could best approach through organized work.

Local people, if aware of the problem, were apathetic about it. After all, the children had as good nutrition as they themselves had had when they were growing up. They had ideas of what really sick children looked like but less well defined ones when it came to the really well child. Angel wings and bowed legs were often considered hereditary and not the result of malnutrition.

One phase of the problem concerned the child's mother and her inability to participate in organized extension work. How could one help the child if there were no avenues to reach the mother? Many of the young mothers had difficulty in going to home demonstration club meetings; a few felt the children would be a bother; while others, the job of getting ready a group of children to take to group meetings was a superhuman task.

III. Analysis of Efforts to Bring About A Solution

The live-at-home program had been the basis upon which the Extension Service had founded a program in this county. Through this program, the home demonstration agent had been gradually building up a consciousness of the importance of food to the health of the individual. The home demonstration club organization itself was one of the greatest influences in the whole county. Taking stock of these facts, Miss Phillips felt sure the club leaders in the fields of gardening, food preservation, and nutrition would stand solidly behind any program to improve all the conditions surrounding the children of Logan County. In addition, she would have the help of Miss Gertrude E. Conant, Arkansas' outstanding nutritionist since 1917. Fortunately, the county possessed a young former nurse, Mrs. Dan Hall, mother of two small children herself, who was intensely interested in improving child health. Contributing to her interest was the idea that no matter how well she kept her own children, they could not be isolated and that eventually what attacked other children could spread to her own.

Talking over this problem with Mrs. Hall and with other far-seeing mothers and leaders of home demonstration club work, Miss Phillips requested Miss Conant's assistance for the year 1931 on a county-wide project on child care and feeding.

Miss Phillips recognized the fact that the work of one agent or nurse on a problem involving several hundred mothers would, of necessity, be limited. She knew, however, that leaders-- if properly selected and trained--could extend nutrition and child health information to the last family down the road.

"Leaders of Logan County will give up their own home work to try any task they are called upon to do", Miss Phillips commented in her annual report for that year.

Certainly, they seemed willing to undertake child health work, for in 1931--after their initial leader training in child care and parent education-- they became so interested in the subject that they proposed the formation of Better Babies Clubs. "Through these, they felt the instruction received at leader training schools could be carried to every home in the county where there were children under school age.

Leader training meetings were held in the county during intervals of every three or four months. Demonstrations and lectures were given at these meetings on pre-natal care, diet of the child from infancy to school age, and training the child in good food habits. Thirty-one local leaders in nutrition attended. Later, they made their influence felt according to publicity of that year, "in every neighborhood in the county"

"The work of child care was relatively new", notes Miss Phillips in her report, "and we were not sure our women would accept it as we wanted them to". "Sixteen different nutrition leader meetings were held in 1931. We impressed upon leaders that it was their duty to use this information and take it back to their clubs. They did it faithfully and at the end of the year 1932, we had an achievement day for mothers and their babies who had been fed and cared for properly. Fourteen babies were shown. On this day, we organized a Better Babies Club with these 14 babies as charter members."

Because of her interest in better babies, Mrs. Hall was named county chairman of the club. She kept a record of all the babies enrolled, sent child care and training literature provided by the home demonstration agent to each mother, and received reports each month on the children's development. She was on the lookout all the time, according to Miss Phillips, to see that no mother or prospective mother was neglected.

Mrs. Hall reporting to the county home demonstration council in 1934 gave the following facts:

"As county leader in Nutrition, I attended a meeting in Union County in the interest of Better Babies and also attended meetings at Roseville giving Miss Conant's lessons on foods. I entered 150 names of babies in a baby book and also recorded the history of each child. There were 96 children under two years and 54 of pre-school age."

"One hundred and thirty packages of literature have been mailed out. These contained 2 letters written by Miss Phillips, 6 copies of Pre-Natal Care, 22 copies of What Builds Babies, 10 copies of Why Drink Milk, 23 copies of Why Sleep, 42 copies of Infant Care, 58 copies of Child 1-6, 4 copies of Good Posture, 63 copies of the Canning Budget for Babies, 40 Time Cards, and 20 copies of Diet from Infancy to School Age."

"Served as local chairman for Baby Conference at Paris. Mailed out 47 notice appointment cards. Worked one day at the Paris Baby Conference where 54 babies and pre-school age children were examined."

By 1935, a two-day conference and clinic was one of the big affairs in home demonstration history. During the two days, 68 babies were scored. Babies were weighed, measured, and examined by a physician. Each mother was given a conference with the State Nutritionist and received a leaflet on good foods for children. One interesting feature of the clinic was the way in which the physical and mental development of the "Better Babies" excelled that of the babies whose mothers had not had that instruction. "The object lesson was so good", said Miss Conant, "that 60 or more mothers entered their children in Better Babies Clubs".

The nutrition leader in each home demonstration club was local leader for the Better Babies Club. She looked after the mothers and babies in her community and saw that the mothers received the necessary literature and instruction. She obtained this literature from the county chairman who in turn received it from the county health department and from the county home demonstration agent.

By 1935, the idea had spread to other counties and 470 mothers had enrolled 545 babies. Nutrition leaders in Logan County were reported in 1935 as having met three or four times a year for training in this work.

At the first meeting, the matter of food for the expectant mother, as well as the physical care necessary to keep her in good condition, was discussed. At the second meeting, there was a consideration of questions raised by the nutrition leaders growing out of their work with the mothers in their neighborhood. They also took up the diet of the child from infancy to school age, giving special emphasis to regularity of feeding. The third meeting included a discussion of the formation of good food habits and the correction of bad ones.

By 1935, the county had 7 Better Babies Clubs with 208 babies enrolled. The county chairman of Better Babies work reported in addition:

- 1294 pieces of literature sent out,
- 21 press articles written,
- 137 visits made to mothers by agent or leader,
- 37 meetings held by agents,
- 58 meetings held by leader.

She also noted that there were "now 41 local nutrition leaders in Better Babies work and that 67 mothers assisted had helped other mothers."

She commented on closing, "The most important literature we have and the hardest one to get is 'Baby's Time Card'. We have calls every day for them and we cannot get them. We could use one hundred right now if we could get them."

By 1939, there were 52 nutrition leaders in Logan County, all of whom were doing work in child care. Two hundred and seventy-three babies were enrolled for this year and there were 329 already on the roll. A total of 223 babies were examined in clinics and 157 given immunization. By this time, the county health nurse had assumed the responsibility for holding well baby clinics. Sponsored by the home demonstration clubs, 23 such clinics were held in 23 communities during the year.

"The nurse and I meet", writes Miss Phillips, "once each week and work out together the places where the clinics are to be held. Mrs. Hixon (county health nurse) keeps in close touch with home demonstration clubs and has been of untold help in projecting Better Babies Club work".

By 1941, there were 14 Better Babies Clubs in the county. Six of these had a project known as "Children's Hour". Its purpose was to give rest to the mothers and training to the children during a home demonstration club meeting. Mothers say they have been able to listen and participate in their home demonstration club programs knowing the children were being cared for. The children look forward to these meetings. The hour is divided into three parts--the first 20 minutes for story telling and singing, the next 20 minutes for picture coloring and nature study, and the third period for supervised play. The children have cuddly toys, bean bags, peg boards, and a sand pile. The East Paris home demonstration club has a club house and playground where the children meet each week and play.

The chairman in charge of the children's work at Tokalon had two baby cribs made for the home demonstration club rooms. Then she had a double deck bed made for older children. The women painted the beds and made two mattresses for it.

Each home demonstration club that year decided to subscribe for a parent's magazine for club use. They also bought two sets of books on child care for county libraries at Booneville and Paris.

As the program advanced, so did the interest of the mothers.

Self-help children's garments were an early project and also the making of homemade toys. The canning budget for the baby (as instituted by the Extension Specialist) became a part of each mother's program. By 1943, the home demonstration agent reported that the "birth rate was on the increase and would probably continue". She noted that it has been a task to get enough literature for expectant mothers. Some leaders have loaned their bulletins on child care and feeding to many in their neighborhood.

A total of 493 children were enrolled in 1943, 14 clinics were held, 407 pre-school children were examined, 704 mothers were assisted, 2,984 infants' garments and 2,148 self-help garments were made, 207 mothers provided homemade play equipment for the children, 28 provided home furniture

for the children, 490 women studied family relationships, and 16 individual Home Demonstration Clubs added books on family relationships, Child Guidance and Parent Relations to their club libraries.

IV. Evaluation of Results

A. Obstacles yet to be overcome.

There have been many obstacles standing in the way of further successes. According to Miss Phillips, "Many families move each year in Logan County and there's always a new group of people who have to be educated."

"There is a prevalence of dietary diseases more noticeable in river bottom sections. Then too, landowners are not always interested in tenants' welfare and it's among the tenant group where the greatest problems of malnutrition are."

Lately, many home demonstration club members and leaders of many years standing have left the county for employment in war industries. "Our problem is long standing", says Miss Phillips, "and is one which cannot be solved in a year or in several years."

B. Factors involved in the success of the Logan County Project.

Many influences contributed to the acceptance of Better Babies Club work in Logan County. The fact that the home demonstration agent has devoted something more than a quarter of a century to living among and learning to know the problems of the people with whom she works has been a major factor to its success. She is known and respected by practically every man, woman, and child in Logan County. Her 25 years of work with the live-at-home program and with community and home improvement had everyone's respect and admiration.

She had also become known through the years as a very practical woman with many "down to earth" qualities. Other agency workers admired her and respected her for her good judgment and integrity of purpose.

The home demonstration club program is reaching approximately 50% of all farm women. The indirect influence of these members extended throughout the farm and village population. Members of these clubs were thoroughly food conscious as a result of their nutrition work.

There were still other factors in the success of Better Babies. Natural factors also played a part. Depression years-- and repeated droughts-- had impressed the farming population with the necessity for growing and conserving foods in large quantities. Thus-- one great problem-- lack of food-- has been solved at its source.

The nature and character of Logan County rural leaders cannot be minimized. Eager to work and intelligent, they can always be depended upon.

C. Changes in family and community life

Changes introduced into the lives of the people undoubtedly have been many. Unfortunately much of the work done in child care and training and in family relationships is of such an intangible nature that many of the most important results cannot be tabulated. They can only be stated in general terms of happier families, more contented, better trained, and fewer physically handicapped children.

Repeated calls are coming to the home demonstration agent's office and to the nutrition leaders in Logan County--"How can I get my child to eat the foods he should?" "How shall I interest my child in milk?" "When should I begin to feed my baby solid foods?" Etc.

"Increased interest everywhere is evidenced in nutrition", says the home demonstration agent.

V. Results over the entire State of Arkansas

Results in Logan County have already been tabulated. The effects of Better Babies work throughout the state of Arkansas have been outstanding. By the end of 1943, there were 413 Better Babies Clubs in 50 counties with 7,247 children from 4,466 families enrolled. Lawrence County had the largest enrollment with 19 clubs having an enrollment of 619 babies in 316 clubs.

Child Health Day was observed in 29 counties by 388 home demonstration clubs through exhibits, programs, and demonstrations on child care.

A total of 58 counties reported 958 child development leaders. Thirty-four counties reported 104 leader training meetings held. Thirty counties reported 156 clinics conducted in cooperation with public health nurses and doctors.

Pulaski County held 19 clinics with 212 babies examined and immunized. Twenty-one Better Babies leaders in Pulaski County assisted 114 prospective mothers in pre-natal care.

Thirty-nine counties reported that 171 home demonstration clubs have arranged to care for young children during home demonstration club meetings.

Craighead County reported three home demonstration clubs worked out plans for older women to care for children while mothers worked in fields.

A total of 12,624 families reported providing recommended clothing, furniture, and play equipment for children and 12,704 families adopted recommended child feeding practices in 76 counties.

Home demonstration agents in Arkansas spent 664 and 1/4 days on child care and parent education work. A total of 666 men in 20 counties and 12,611 women in 70 counties participated in this work. The families represented involved 20,695 children. "There is a trend", according to Arkansas State home demonstration agent's report for 1943, "toward interesting both men and women in this phase of the home demonstration program."

